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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by Passionists International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

1. Several recent reports highlight the inadequacy of reducing poverty to the presence or lack of money. The publication entitled *Rethinking Poverty: Report on the World Social Situation, 2010* challenges all of us, Governments, civil society, business and social planners, to recognize that poverty has multiple causes and many dimensions. An integrated approach to poverty eradication is essential. The root causes of poverty must be named and addressed. People must again be placed at the heart of our planning. Growth based on speculation that fails to create decent jobs is unacceptable. Real jobs for real people in a real economy are called for.

2. To measure poverty solely in financial terms fails to do justice to its complex reality. A person living in poverty cannot be defined solely in terms of how much or how little money he or she possesses.

3. Poverty and social exclusion are not the result of bad luck or personal weakness, but are most often due to political and economic decisions that favour the powerful over the weak. The cumulative impact of the multiple crises of finance, food, energy and climate change have strained the capacity of the most vulnerable members of our societies to work their way out of the poverty trap. This has particular relevance to indigenous peoples who are disproportionately represented among those living in "extreme poverty"; they lack access to social services, basic health care and education. They are thus open to manipulation by businesses seeking to benefit from their resources without sharing those benefits in a fair way.

4. At the opening of the ninth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (see SG/SM/12418-HR/5013) noted the alarming statistics contained in the *Report on the State of the World's Indigenous Peoples*. They constitute 5 per cent of the world's population and one third of the world's poorest people. In many countries an indigenous child can expect to die 20 years earlier than a non-indigenous child. For many of the 370 million indigenous people in more than 70 countries, violence, brutality and discrimination are daily realities.

5. Members of Passionists International, working with indigenous peoples in many countries, report a noticeable increase in acts of discrimination and violence against our indigenous brothers and sisters.

6. Indigenous peoples usually have a connection with the land, measured in thousands of years. These lands are also often rich in biodiversity, natural resources, water and minerals. Though they have lived on and cared for these lands and resources, they seldom prosper from the fruits of these resources.

7. One thing learned from the rush to meet the Millennium Development Goals and implement national development plans, is that the dominant model of development has often created disadvantages for indigenous persons, families and communities.

8. Indigenous people are caught in the tension created by the demands for greater production that come with bilateral free trade agreements and their own right to self-determination. Practices that worsen their situation include:

* Issued without formal editing.

- The taking of large tracts of indigenous land for biofuel production which also threatens biodiversity
- Infringement of their traditional ownership of land
- The granting of mining leases negatively affecting their health, well-being and prosperity

Some members of Passionists International who stand with the people in these struggles receive death threats and have been threatened with imprisonment or expulsion from the country.

9. While policy is best developed at the multilateral level, practical efforts to achieve poverty eradication are best done at local and country levels within an enabling international environment and maximum participation by the people who are living in poverty. Several countries with indigenous populations fail to honour the principles they accepted in adopting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Of particular concern is the failure to respect the principle of free, prior and informed consent.

10. A positive development of the recent Millennium Development Goals Summit is that indigenous peoples are no longer invisible. Their plight and their particular needs are mentioned in five paragraphs (see General Assembly resolution 65/1). States are reminded of their responsibility to ensure respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people.

11. In calling for partnerships to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, the Summit called upon the private sector to contribute to poverty eradication by adapting its business models to the needs and possibilities of the poor. The relationship of the private sector to indigenous communities has special relevance in the areas of land ownership, food security and the extractive industries.

12. Regarding Goal 7, the Summit called for stronger political commitment and action at all levels to implement global objectives on sustainable forest management, to reduce the loss of forest cover and improve the livelihoods of those that depend on forests by developing a comprehensive and more effective approach to financing activities. To achieve these goals, local and indigenous communities must be involved. There is also a call to address the threats posed by illicit activities.

13. Such activities affect indigenous people who depend upon the forests for their livelihood and who, in turn, play a custodial role in sustaining the forests. More and more they are subject to illicit activities by both State and non-State actors.

14. The mid-term assessment of the Second Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples shows that very few Member States have officially recognized their indigenous communities. Even fewer have granted constitutional protection to indigenous peoples. Without protection before the law, the human rights of indigenous peoples are endangered, their land and resources claims are denied, and all aspects of their advocacy work are handicapped.

15. The various crises we face offer an opportunity for major rethinking of the dominant model of development. This has been too focused on economic growth to the neglect of human well-being, human rights and environmental sustainability.

16. In the past some development projects, in the name of progress, have displaced indigenous peoples from their lands and harmed their culture and right to self-determination. This must not be allowed to continue.

Recommendations

17. Recommendations include:

- Country poverty reduction strategies must include targets related to indigenous issues. They must ensure the active participation of indigenous peoples who can and should be agents of change themselves.
- In the elaboration of national development plans, States must ensure indigenous representatives, including indigenous women, are consulted so that their needs are not compromised by such planning.
- To better monitor progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and to create better policies and programmes, States must strengthen their national statistical systems to ensure that data collected is reliable and disaggregated. This will help to recognize and respond to the needs of distinct groups, including indigenous peoples.
- International frameworks, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (see General Assembly resolution 61/295), must be made operational at the local level through policies and programmes to redress social and economic injustices. This has particular relevance to the presence and activity of corporations on indigenous lands.
- Creating decent work opportunities as an effective tool to assist those living in poverty is urgent. In planning development to meet the Millennium Development Goals, States should actively seek ways to incorporate indigenous skills into agricultural, forest and rural programmes.

Note: Statement also endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Congregations of Saint Joseph, Dominican Leadership Conference, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Loretto Community, Salesian Missions, Sisters of Charity Federation, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and UNANIMA International.